

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 CU-02 MCT-01 ACDA-07 DHA-02 COME-00 EB-08
TRSE-00 /076 W

-----231911Z 059972 /50

R 231711Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3771
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 1376

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, ES
SUBJECT: CATHEDRAL MASS ATTRACTS THOUSANDS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 1338

1. SUMMARY. THE NATION'S SINGLE MASS ON SUNDAY, MARCH
20 IN
FRONT OF THE SAN SALVADOR CATHEDRAL, PRESIDED OVER BY ARCH-
BISHOP ROMERO, ATTRACTED SOME 12-15 THOUSAND FAITHFUL.
DESPITE THE STRONG OVERHEAD MID-MORNING SUN, THE INHERENT
PROBLEMS OF CONDUCTING A MASS FOR SUCH AN ENORMOUS CROWD,
PRESSURES TO CANCEL FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND ALLIED SECTORS,
INTERNAL CHURCH OPPOSITION, AND THE FEAR THAT POLITICAL
GROUPS MIGHT TRY TO TURN THE EVENT IN A DIFFERENT
DIRECTION, THE ORGANIZERS WERE SUCCESSFUL IN REALIZING
A DIGNIFIED RELIGIOUS CEREMONY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE CROWD: ALMOST TOTALLY FILLING THE LARGE PLAZA
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IN FRONT OF THE CATHEDRAL AND SPILLING OVER INTO
ADJOINING STREETS, THE WORSHIPERS PRESENTED A
CROSS-SECTION OF THE COUNTRY'S RURAL AND URBAN
WORKING CLASSES. ALTHOUGH THE MULTITUDE WAS
PRIMARILY LOWER AND LOWER MIDDLE CLASS IN
COMPOSITION, THERE WAS A SPRINKLING OF PERSONS WHO
WOULD NOT NORMALLY VENTURE INTO THE CENTER CITY,

I.E., REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SUBURBAN MIDDLE CLASS. MUCH OF THE CROWD WAS DIVIDED INTO SMALL GROUPS GATHERED AROUND HAND-LETTERED PLACARDS IDENTIFYING THE PARISH OF ORIGIN. WOMEN OUTNUMBERED MEN, BUT NOT IN THE OVERWHELMING PROPORTION THAT ONE SEES AT REGULAR SUNDAY SERVICES. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE MANY ELDERLY AND DRESSED-IN-BLACK PARISHIONERS, THERE WERE ALSO MANY YOUTHS AND MIDDLE AGED. A SIZEABLE PERCENTAGE WERE BAREFOOTED CAMPESIONS. THE ARCHBISHOP, WHO CONDUCTED THE MASS ON THE FRONT STEPS OF THE CATHEDRAL, HAD THE ASSISTANCE OF SOME 60-70 PARISH PRIESTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY (INCLUDING AT LEAST FOUR AMCITS). THE CROWD WAS ORDERLY, PIOUS, AND SHOWED NO HOSTILITY. THE ARCHBISHOP RECEIVED WARM APPLAUSE WHEN HE APPEARED, AND AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING HIS SERMON. THE TRAFFIC OF PEOPLE AND VEHICLES IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA WAS NOT GREATLY DISTURBED BY THE SERVICE, WITH THE ORGANIZERS USING BOY SCOUTS TO DIRECT TRANSPORT AROUND THE PLAZA. BEYOND SEVERAL MOTORCYCLE POLICE HELPING TO MOVE TRAFFIC, THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE SECURITY SERVICES.

3. THE PURPOSE: THE SERVICE HAD SEVERAL PURPOSES. THE FIRST WAS TO HOLD A MASS IN MEMORY OF FATHER GRANDE, THE JESUIT PRIEST GUNNED DOWN ON MARCH 12. THE SECOND, ACCORDING TO THE ARCHBISHOP, WAS TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT A CHURCH MASS IS ALL ABOUT, AND THE SOLIDARITY OF THE FAITHFUL AND THEIR CLERGY IN THE FACE OF HARASSMENT. PRIOR TO THE SERVICE ITSELF, YSAF (THE CATHOLIC RADIO STATION) READ THE CHURCH'S LIST OF CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

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AND TERRORIST INCIDENTS RECENTLY DIRECTED AGAINST THE CLERGY.

4. BACKGROUND: ALTHOUGH EVERYTHING WENT WELL WITH THE MASS, AND IT PROJECTED THE APPEARANCE OF A UNIFIED CHURCH, THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD OF CONSIDERABLE BICKERING WITHIN THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY. THE REFTEL DSECRIBED OPPOSITION TO THE ARCHBISHOP'S PLANS THAT EMANATED FROM THE GOES AND ASSORTED PRIVATE SECTOR ALLIES. THIS OPPOSITION HAD STRONG ADVOCATES WITHIN THE CHURCH AS WELL. AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL,

TWO OF THE COUNTRY'S FOUR BISHOPS ARGUED AGAINST ANY ANTI-GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS OR ACTS. THE BISHOP OF SAN MIGUEL, WHO HAPPENS TO BE A COLONEL AND THE CHIEF CHAPLAIN OF THE ARMED FORCE, WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE SINGLE MASS SCHEME.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 1376

NEITHER WOULD THE ACTING BISHOP OF SANTA ANA. THESE TWO VOICES, ADDED TO THAT OF THE PAPAL NUNCIO WHO REPORTEDLY SPOKE OUT AGAINST ANY CHURCH-STATE POLITICAL CONFRONTATION, MUST HAVE GIVEN ARCHBISHOP ROMERO SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF HIS PROPOSALS. APPARENTLY, THE ARCHBISHOP DECIDED TO GO AHEAD, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE HE SENSED ALMOST TOTAL SUPPORT AT THE WORKING CLASS LEVEL. THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT TO ROMERO SINCE HE ASSUMED OFFICE SEVERAL MONTHS AGO KNOWING HE WAS NOT A POPULAR CHOICE OF THE CLERICS. WHEREAS BEFORE BECOMING ARCHBISHOP, ROMERO SPOKE OUT AGAINST MIXING RELIGION AND POLITICS AND SINGLED OUT ACTIVIST JESUITS AS TROUBLEMAKERS, THE ARCHBISHOP HAS NOW SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH JESUIT ADVISERS. ONE OF THESE TOLD A POLFF THAT, WHILE HE AND HIS FELLOW YOUNG PRIESTS ARE IMPRESSED WITH THE ARCHBISHOP'S STRENGTH IN PURSUING HIS PRESENT POLICIES, THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT HE SEEMS TO FOLLOW THE ADVICE OF THOSE AROUND HIM AT THE MOMENT HE MAKES DECISIONS. THE PRIEST SAID THAT THE ARCHBISHOP IS QTE NOT A WELL MAN, EITHER PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY UNQTE AND HE MIGHT NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO CARRY THE FIGHT MUCH LONGER. PERHAPS
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CONFIRMING THIS, THE DATT REPORTS THAT ONE SOURCE HAS TOLD HIM THAT THE ARCHBISHOP HAS ALREADY DECIDED THAT THE

SUNDAY MASS WAS THE FINAL ACT OF HIS FORAY INTO POLITICS.
WHETHER TRUE OR NOT, THE SERMON AS THE ARCHBISHOP'S LAST PUBLIC
UTTERANCE SINCE SUNDAY.

5. COMMENT. EVEN IF THE IMMEDIATE CHURCH PROTEST
OVER THE DEATH OF FATHER GRANDE AND OTHER RECENT HARASSMENT
HAS ENDED, THE FACT THAT THE CHURCH STOOD UP TO THE GOVER-
NMENT SHOULD NOT SOON BE FORGOTTEN. GIVEN THE PRESENT CIRCUM-
STANCES OF THE POLITICAL SCENE, IT IS LIKELY ONLY A MATTER
OF TIME BEFORE ANOTHER CHURCH-STATE QTE INCIDENT UNQTE
OCCURS. WHAT THE ARCHBISHOP'S RESPONSE WILL BE, GIVEN THE
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS WEEK'S WORK, IS HARD TO PREDICT.
GIVEN THE LACK OF SUPPORT HE HAD FROM THE NUNCIO, TWO OF HIS
FELLOW BISHOPS, AND THE PRESSURES PUT ON HIM BY THE GOVERN-
MENT AND THE ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPS, HE COULD HARDLY BE
EXPECTED TO JUMP INTO EITHER CONFRONTATION WITHOUT A GREAT
DEAL OF THOUGHT.

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